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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 001472

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NOFORN

AF AND H PASS TO SENATOR HAGEL
USEUCOM FOR GENERAL WALD FROM AMBASSADOR CAMPBELL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PRESIDENT OBASANJO MEETS WITH SENATOR
HAGEL

REF: A. ABUJA 017
[1](#)B. ABUJA 1307 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. At a meeting with Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, President Olusegun Obasanjo described a regional security initiative, the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Obasanjo also described negotiations with the Cameroonian President over the Bakassi peninsula without mentioning a previous commitment to withdraw Nigerian forces from Bakassi by September 15. He assessed the risk of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria as low, and linked a Darfur settlement with reduced terrorist risk in Africa. Obasanjo took a completely unambiguous stance on Charles Taylor, stressing that Taylor would be handed over only to a democratically elected government in Liberia. As expected, he also suggested debt relief for Nigeria. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) President Obasanjo was accompanied by the following:

--Major-General Abdullahi Mohammed (Ret.), Chief of Staff to the President

--Prof. Julius Ihonvbere, Special Advisor, Policy & Programmes Monitoring

--Mrs. Remi Oyo, Senior Special Assistant, Media & Publicity

--Mr. B. S. Ilochi, Assistant Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

--Mr. E. A. Balogun, Assistant Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

--Mr. Onochie Ben Amobi, Deputy Chief of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

--Mr. Kabiru Garba, Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff to the President

[1](#)3. (U) Present with Senator Hagel were the following:

--The Ambassador

--General Chuck Wald, Deputy US European Commander, EUCOM

--Major-General Jonathan "Scott" Gration, Director, Plans and Policy, EUCOM

--Mr. Terry Snell, Political Advisor, EUCOM

--Dr. Andrew Parasiliti, Foreign Policy Advisor to Senator Hagel

--Capt. Randel Zeller, USN (Ret.), National Security Advisor to Senator Hagel

--Poloff (notetaker)

[1](#)4. (U) President Obasanjo opened by welcoming Senator Hagel, and he noted the Senator's interest in international trade. Referring to the Darfur peace talks, which he was opening later in the morning, Obasanjo noted that strife-torn parts of Africa--including the Niger Delta, Liberia and Darfur--would need trade to restore genuine stability once security has been re-established.

Security in the Gulf of Guinea: a Regional Commission

[1](#)5. (C) In response to comments from Sen. Hagel and Gen. Wald, Obasanjo observed that Gulf of Guinea security and stability had been a pre-occupation ever since he became president in 1999. His first step was to consult with other national leaders in the region. Out of those initial conversations, he "spearheaded" the establishment of a Gulf of Guinea commission. His goal was an organization that would ensure peace and security, a "virile, strong

organization" that would ward off threats from outside the region. He noted with pride the Gulf of Guinea Treaty to establish such an organization. When the treaty has been ratified by five different nations in the region, the organization would be launched. (Three have ratified so far, he said.) As recently as a month ago, he continued, he met with four heads of state in Brazzaville to discuss such a possible regional organization based on the treaty. Nigeria, he said, is not asking for the headquarters of such an organization, nor would Nigeria foresee providing the Secretary-General. He speculated that the Secretary-General

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might come from Sao Tome, and the headquarters might be located in Gabon. Ghana, he concluded, had already indicated interest in joining the Gulf of Guinea initiative, as well as Senegal and possibly South Africa, some day.

16. (C) General Wald offered to help Nigeria "any way we can" on Gulf of Guinea security. Obasanjo said he'd "keep (the USG) informed." As "friends and partners," the USG and GON need have no secrets, he said; "our interests are parallel." Gen. Wald raised the possibility of U.S. observer status. Obasanjo responded that he would need to talk to the other heads of state of partner nations. "We need Gulf of Guinea security more than you do."

17. (C) On the Delta, Obasanjo said trouble dated from the period after the civil war, after the discovery of marketable oil. "We haven't solved it," but "we are dealing with it." He said that his government was doing a study of the Delta, to try to find a way forward. He anticipated the study being completed by October 1, and said that he hoped the U.S. and the U.K. would be able to assist in carrying out the study's recommendations.

Bakassi Handover Progressing, but Withdrawal Delayed

18. (C) Obasanjo noted that when he came to office, Nigeria "had problems" with three countries in the Gulf of Guinea region. Issues with Sao Tome have been resolved. Good progress has been made with respect to Equatorial Guinea. With Cameroon, he said that both he and President Biya are "personally satisfied" with the status of the Bakassi handover. Obasanjo said he hoped Biya would be re-elected in October so that the two of them can finish what they have started. Notwithstanding a previous commitment made by Nigeria to withdraw from the disputed territory by September 15, Obasanjo noted that "small concessions" that might be necessary for a settlement could not easily be made on either side before Cameroon's October elections. In the meantime, he continued, he believed that Cameroon and Nigeria should work to implement the least controversial parts of the International Court of Justice decision defining the Nigerian-Cameroonian border. Then the two states could move on to more difficult areas, such as the maritime demarcation. His goal, he continued, is a solution that has "no losers" and promotes good neighborly relations. He said that at their most recent meeting in Cameroon, he and President Biya also agreed to additional confidence building measures, including road construction. He said that next meeting of the Nigeria/Cameroon joint commission will take place in November.

Darfur Peace Talks: Setting the Bar Low

19. (C) In response to a question from Senator Hagel, Obasanjo discussed possible outcomes from the Darfur peace talks to be started in Abuja later in the day. A best-case scenario would have delegates with clear mandates meeting and agreeing to a political settlement, while a worst-case scenario would have the meetings end inconclusively, with one or more of the parties saying that were not "empowered" to reach agreement. Obasanjo predicted that in the short term, the results would be somewhere between these two possibilities. His minimum goal, he continued, would be agreement by all parties on an agenda, and agreement on the goal of a negotiated settlement. If he could achieve that, then "thank God for small mercies," said Obasanjo.

Terrorist Threat Level: Not a Problem for Nigeria

10. (C) When Senator Hagel asked Obasanjo to assess the terrorist threat in Nigeria, particularly in the North, Obasanjo answered that while he could not say Nigeria is "absolutely devoid of fundamentalists," he does not see Islamic fundamentalism as a problem. To show how insignificant it is, he cited two examples of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria. First, a man in Kebbi State claimed he created "Mecca in Nigeria," declared himself chief of his sect, and demanded that all brides spend 48 hours with

him before marriage. Obasanjo, laughing, said that the GON "of course, had to remove the chief." Second, a cult in Yobe State claimed to be in solidarity with the Taliban (reftel A). Obasanjo explained that understanding of Islam in the North is low, and "these people can be used."

11. (C) Obasanjo observed that he needed to watch Nigeria's own elite. In Plateau, he continued, if he had not declared a state of emergency (reftel B), the result would have been the growth of fundamentalism among both Christians and Muslims. He said that he had just visited the scene of the violence in Plateau State, and visitors "wouldn't believe there had been violence three months earlier." (Note. In a visit to the same place in late June, Emboffs observed that the town was devastated, nearly a ghost town. End Note.)

12. (C) Obasanjo observed that there is a "possibility" that organizations such as Al Qaeda or Taliban could try to establish themselves in northern Nigeria "if they are pushed out elsewhere." Conditions in the Sahel would have a major impact on whether or not terrorists groups tried to establish themselves. That is why, he continued, it is so important to establish peace in the Sudan, and why information sharing amongst all countries involved--including the U.S.--is so important. He said that the Nigerian State Security Service is convening this week an "All-Africa" security meeting to exchange information. Gen. Wald said that the U.S. would like to attend as an observer. President Obasanjo said he would need to consult with other participants.

Genesis of the Dream Team

13. (C) In response to Senator Hagel's question about Nigeria's economic progress, Obasanjo launched into a long story in which he spoke about his military and political career. He's a strong believer in democracy, he said, and with over 350 languages spoken in Nigeria, a strong federal government is the only way to keep Nigeria together. Some may say Nigeria is copying the U.S., but Obasanjo said "you should copy what works." He spoke of his imprisonment under the Abacha regime ("because I couldn't keep my mouth shut"), his release, and his 1999 election with a two-thirds majority of voters. When he was re-elected in 2003, he said he decided to focus on economic-social issues, and decided some critical areas needed technocrats. But, he stressed, he formed the economic dream team, and he is the boss of the team.

14. (C) In developing Nigeria's economic plan, Obasanjo said that the World Bank and IMF were consulted. But it was important to present the overall strategy, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), to the Nigerian public as "our own thing."

15. (C) Obasanjo then made another not-so-veiled plea for debt relief. In return for Nigeria's following the spirit of the Bretton-Woods institutions, he suggested, "Give us a reward." Like anywhere else, he explained, people resist the withdrawal of subsidies, so wealthy nations should do something to ease the pain of Nigerian economic reforms.

Extraditing Charles Taylor: No Ambiguity

16. (C) Senator Hagel thanked Obasanjo for his "leadership and courage" in easing tensions in Liberia, then asked the President what are his intentions regarding Taylor. Obasanjo was firm and uncategorical in repeating the GON's position: Taylor will be extradited only at the request of a "democratically elected government in Liberia," and whatever that government chooses to do with Taylor is up to them.

Comment

17. (C/NF) Obasanjo vigorously engaged with Senator Hagel. He was shrewd and articulate throughout. He clearly sees his Gulf of Guinea initiative as an African solution to an African security issue--though he acknowledges that the states of the region would need some unspecified help from the U.S. Similarly, he believes that Nigeria can resolve security problems in the Delta, though he raised the likelihood of a request for U.S. and U.K. assistance in carrying out the recommendations of the study he has commissioned. On the possibility of terrorism in the North, he was sanguine and optimistic, assessing the risk as "minimal," while at the same time emphasizing the importance of the sharing of relevant information among the states affected, including the U.S. Moreover, his linkage of a settlement in Sudan to inoculating Nigeria against terrorism was the first such rationale we have heard. On Bakassi, he seemed to reaffirm the traditional Nigerian approach, "a win/win" solution with his regional neighbors, but he did not

repeat his previous commitment to have all Nigerian forces withdrawn from the disputed territory by September 15. His musings on his own presidency indicated his growing preoccupations with his "legacy," which includes his economic reform package.

118. (C) When Gen. Wald requested observer status at the regional meetings concerning security issues, President Obasanjo made no commitment. We note that he has thus far excluded foreign observers from the Darfur talks in Abuja, except for the opening ceremony on August 23. This policy of exclusion seems to reflect the "African solutions to African problems" theme.

119. (C) On the Charles Taylor situation, we note that Obasanjo was uncategorical in terms of the circumstances surrounding Taylor's extradition. There was no room for interpretation.

120. (U) Senator Hagel has cleared this cable.
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